



**U.S. AIR FORCE**

## **This Week in USAF and PACAF History** **29 March – 4 April 2010**



**1 Apr 1935 The North American AT-6 Texan prototype first flew.** One of the most widely used aircraft in history, the AT-6 advanced trainer was known as the **“Pilot Maker”** because the U.S. Army Air Forces used it extensively in flying schools. Of the 15,495 Texans built between 1938 and 1945, over 10,000 went to the AAF while the others went to the Navy and more than 30 Allied nations. British “Battle of Britain” pilots trained in Texans that were pushed across the Canadian border to comply with neutrality laws. When war broke out in Korea (1950), T-6s flew “mosquito missions,” spotting enemy troops and guns and marking them for attack by fighter-bombers.



**3 Apr 1935 Hickam land purchase.** The U.S. Army’s Hawaiian Department drew a check for just over one million dollars to buy 2,225 acres of land adjoining Fort Kamehameha for construction of an air base, later named Hickam Field. Purchased from the Bishop Damon and Queen Emma Estates, the land was the site of Watertown, Puuloa Camp, sugar cane fields, and 300 acres of algarroba trees.

**3 Apr 1939** President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the **National Defense Act of 1940**, which provided the Army Air Corps more than 48,000 personnel, a \$300 million budget, and 6,000 airplanes. It also authorized the Air Corps to train black pilots.

**1 Apr 1952 Sabres score big; Gabreski repeats as an ace.** Fifth Air Force Sabre pilots in the Korean War destroyed ten MiGs while losing one F-86. Colonel Francis S. Gabreski, USAF, Commander of the 51st FIW, destroyed a MiG to become the eighth jet ace of the war. On December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941 Gabreski was one of the few U.S. pilots to get airborne against the Japanese attacking Oahu. He served in the European theater of World War II and scored 28 kills—the most of any pilot fighting the Luftwaffe. In the Korean War, Colonel Gabreski scored 6.5 kills and was one of only seven pilots to become an ace in two wars. Colonel Gabreski on wingmen:

*"The wingman is absolutely indispensable. I look after the wingman. The wingman looks after me. It's another set of eyes protecting you. That's the defensive part. Offensively, it gives you a lot more firepower. We work together. We fight together. The wingman knows what his responsibilities are, and knows what mine are. Wars are not won by individuals. They're won by teams."*



OPR: PACAF/HO



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**3 Apr 1963 Joint Use Agreement, Hickam AFB-Honolulu International Airport** was signed by Brig Gen John A. Rouse, Commander, PACAFBACECOM, and Dr. Fujio Matsuda, Director of Transportation for the State of Hawaii. It specified that for the purposes of aerial and ground operation, Hickam AFB and Honolulu International Airport comprised a single airport.



**3 Apr 1967 First Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF).** Chief Paul W. Airey (at left) spent much of his 27-year career as a first sergeant. During World War II, he served as an aerial gunner on B-24 bombers and is credited with 28 combat missions in Europe. He was forced to bail out of his flak-damaged aircraft, captured and became a prisoner of war from July 1944 to May 1945. On 3 Apr 1967, he became the first CMSAF. Chief Airey passed away on March 11, 2009.

The CMSAF serves as the personal adviser to the Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Air Force on the welfare, readiness, morale, and proper utilization and progress of the enlisted force.

**29 Mar 1972 OPERATION LINEBACKER.** North Vietnam began a massive invasion of the South. In response, the U.S. discarded most of the previous restrictions on U.S. air power. Operation LINEBACKER I struck targets throughout North Vietnam, including Hanoi and Haiphong. Military commanders, rather than the White House, selected targets based on military objectives and far less on political considerations. US airpower bombed rail and road networks and mined harbors to severely reduce enemy supply shipments while simultaneously attacking enemy forces in the field. The US air strikes were the primary factor in the defeat of the North Vietnam offensive. (Photo of F-4 strike aircraft at right.)



**31 Mar 1975 Consolidation of military airlift.** One of the "lessons learned" in the Vietnam War was the large duplication of airlift effort between Military Airlift Command (MAC), Tactical Air Command (TAC), and PACAF. In December 1974, the Air Force had consolidated TAC's airlift resources with those of MAC, which became the single airlift manager. On 31



March 1975, the USAF's overseas tactical airlift resources in PACAF, USAFE, and the Alaskan Air Command were also transferred to MAC. However, during the Air Force reorganization of 1992, most CONUS-based tactical airlift was redistributed to Air Combat Command (ACC), while overseas tactical airlift was reassigned to PACAF and USAFE. (The photo at left is a Yokota-based C-130.)



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4 Apr – 16 Sep 1975 **South Vietnam evacuation.** As communist forces took over South Vietnam, more than 130,000 refugees fled by sea and air. The Vietnamese refugee airlift, the largest aerial evacuation in history, encompassed a series of overlapping operations: Babylift, New Life, Frequent Wind, and New Arrivals. The Air Force, working with the Navy and private contractors, flew more than 50,000 refugees from Southeast Asia to islands in the Pacific Ocean and eventually to new homes in the United States. Aircraft involved included C-141, C-130, CH-53, HH-53 and C-9. Details are available in the USAF study, “*The United States Air Force and Humanitarian Airlift Operations, 1947-1994*” at <http://www.airforcehistory.hq.af.mil/Publications/Annotations/haulmanhuman.htm>. (Historynet.com photo at left provided by Ms. Kathy Manney.)

On 4 Apr 1975, a C-5 crashed in an emergency landing near Saigon while flying the first mission of **Operation Babylift**. It was carrying South Vietnamese children and their escorts from Tan Son Nhut AB in Saigon to Clark AB. Of the 314 passengers, 176 survived the crash. First Lieutenant Regina C. Aune, a flight nurse aboard the C-5, ignored her own injuries, which included a broken leg, to help evacuate nearly 80 children from the wreckage. She later received the 1975 Cheney Award. The C-5 pilot and copilot, Captains Dennis W. Traynor III and Telford W. Harp, received the Air Force Cross for extraordinary heroism.



Despite this tragedy, the operation succeeded as C-141s and commercial planes moved 1,794 orphans from South Vietnam and Thailand to the U.S. through 9 May.

30-31 Mar 1979 **Mackay Trophy.** Maj James E. McArdle, Jr., and his four-man H-3 helicopter crew (Det 1, 33ARRS) saved 28 Taiwanese sailors from their shipwrecked freighter **Ta Lai** in the Yellow Sea after their ship ran aground. The H-3 crew made three trips delivering Taiwanese sailors to Kwang-ju AB, fighting waves of 12 to 15 feet and winds in excess of 15 knots. For this event, McArdle earned the MacKay Trophy.

1 Apr 1997 **B-2s became operational** at Whiteman AFB, Missouri, where six of the aircraft were initially based to serve with the 509<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing. Gen Richard E. Hawley, the ACC Commander, announced the initial operational capability of the 509 BW's B-2A Spirit after earlier, successful tests of the JDAM and the GPS-Aided Munition (GAM).